

Wet Woodland Garden Native Plant Selections & Design

What is a Wet Woodland garden?

Shaded areas of the yard can be challenging places for grass to grow. Luckily, Illinois has dozens of native plant species that thrive in shade. Instead of a traditional lawn, consider shade-loving groundcovers, like sedges and ferns. For interest, add other shade plants that are taller and bloom.

This guide features a planting plan focused on natives typically found in wet Illinois woodlands. The plan creates year-round interest for homeowners and extends the foraging season for pollinators. Additionally, native plants help soak up rainfall and can be used in rain gardens. For more information, visit the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website: extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture.

Wet Woodland Garden Plants

This example garden design utilizes plants that grow in shade to part shade conditions with moist to wet soil.

Wildflowers – To extend pollinator foraging seasons, this selection of wildflowers includes species that bloom from April to October.

- **Bloodroot** (Latin name *Sanguinaria canadensis*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Moist to mesic soil.
 - White flowers in early spring.
 - Attracts bees.
 - Grows to 1 foot tall and ½ foot wide.
 - Tolerates drought.
- **Wild Ginger** (Latin name *Asarum canadense*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Moist soil.
 - Red flowers in spring (not showy).
 - Grows to 1 foot tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
 - Does not tolerate drought.
- **Wild Geranium** (Latin name *Geranium maculatum*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Mesic to dry soil.
 - Pink flowers in spring.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies and is a caterpillar host plant.
 - Grows 1 to 2 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
 - Tolerates drought.
- **Tall Bellflower** (Latin name *Campanula americana*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Moist to mesic soil.
 - Blue flowers in summer.
 - Attracts bees and butterflies.
 - Grows 2 to 6 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
 - Drought tolerant but may yellow and droop.

- **Black Cohosh** (Latin name *Actaea racemosa*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Moist to dry soil.
 - White flowers in summer.
 - Attracts bees and birds.
 - Grows 3 to 7 feet tall and 2 to 4 feet wide.
 - Drought tolerant but may yellow and droop.
- **Great Blue Lobelia** (Latin name *Lobelia siphilitica*) –
 - Part shade.
 - Wet to mesic soil.
 - Blue flowers mid-summer into fall.
 - Attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
 - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
 - Does not tolerate drought.

Other – Grasses, sedges, and ferns add texture and seasonal interest to the garden. Some also act as groundcovers, which help to maintain moisture levels and suppress weed growth.

- **Rosy Sedge** (Latin name *Carex rosea*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Wet to mesic soil.
 - Green grassy foliage throughout the growing season.
 - Attracts birds and is a caterpillar host plant.
 - Grows to 1 foot tall and 1 foot wide.
 - Tolerates drought.
- **Christmas Fern** (Latin name *Polystichum acrostichoides*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Moist to mesic soil.
 - Dark green foliage throughout the growing season, semi-evergreen in winter.
 - Grows 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
 - Tolerates drought.
- **Cinnamon Fern** (Latin name *Osmunda cinnamomea*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Wet to moist soil.
 - Green foliage throughout the growing season.
 - Grows 2 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide.
 - Does not tolerate drought.
- **Tufted Hairgrass** (Latin name *Deschampsia caespitosa*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Wet to mesic soil.
 - Grassy foliage throughout the growing season.
 - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
 - Does not tolerate drought.

Shrubs – Shrubs add structure and seasonal interest to the garden.

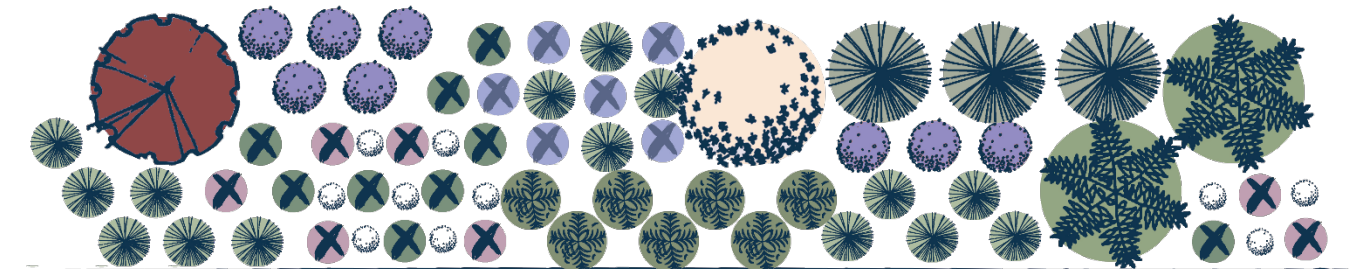
- **Winterberry** (Latin name *Ilex verticillata*) –
 - Full to part shade.
 - Wet to mesic soil.
 - White flowers in spring with red berries summer into winter.
 - Attracts bees and birds.
 - Grows 3 to 10 feet tall and 3 to 5 feet wide.
 - Does not tolerate drought.

PLANTING DESIGN

Example Design

In this example design for planting a rectangular 6 foot wide by 25 foot long wet woodland garden, you will need:

- **6 Rosy Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping at the front left corner.
- **1 Winterberry** at the back left, behind the Rosy Sedge.
- **5 Tall Bellflower** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping to the right of the Winterberry.
- **8 Wild Ginger, 5 Wild Geranium, and 7 Bloodroot** spaced 1½ feet apart in a mixed grouping to the right of the Rosy Sedge, and in front of the Tall Bellflower.
- **7 Christmas Fern** spaced 1½ feet apart along the front edge of the garden, in front of the Great Blue Lobelia and Rosy Sedge grouping and to the right of the Wild Ginger, Wild Geranium, and Bloodroot grouping.
- **1 Black Cohosh** at the back, behind the Christmas Fern and to the right of the Great Blue Lobelia and Rosy Sedge grouping.
- **5 Rosy Sedge** spaced 1½ feet apart in a grouping along the front of the garden, to the right of the Christmas Fern.
- **3 Tall Bellflower** spaced 1½ feet apart in a grouping behind the Rosy Sedge, to the right of the Black Cohosh.
- **3 Tufted Hairgrass** spaced 2 feet apart along the back edge of the garden, to the right of the Black Cohosh.
- **2 Cinnamon Fern** spaced 3 feet apart to the right of the Rosy Sedge, Tall Bellflower, and Tufted Hairgrass.
- **1 Rosy Sedge, 2 Wild Geranium, and 3 Bloodroot** spaced 1½ feet apart in a mixed grouping at the front right corner, to the right of and in front of the Cinnamon Fern.



Additional Planting Options

If you have more space, duplicate the planting plan located on the inside of this brochure. For less space, consider limiting your garden to three species.

Two options for wet woodland garden native plant combinations that feature only three species are:

Option One:

- Tufted Hairgrass
- Great Blue Lobelia
- Wild Ginger

Option Two:

- Christmas Fern
- Tall Bellflower
- Wild Geranium

Rain Garden Options:

The plants in this brochure are all shade-loving species that prefer moist to wet soils. For placement in a shaded rain garden, they are best suited for the basin.

WHERE TO FIND PLANTS AND MORE INFORMATION

The plant palette is inspired by the Red Oak Rain Garden: <https://redoakraingarden.org/>. The Illinois Native Plant Society webpage lists sources of native plants: illinoisplants.org. For more information about plants, go to the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website: extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture.

PUT YOUR NATIVE PLANT GARDEN ON THE MAP

You can be part of a network of native plantings by registering your Illinois native plant garden or rain garden. This helps build community and encourage native plant use. Add your native plant garden to the map: go.illinois.edu/GardenMap.

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